(b) In so far as Government of India is concerned, Attari Road Land Custom Station (Wagah border) is already a notified route for import and export of goods from Pakistan under Section 7 of the Customs Act, *vide* Notification No. 63/94-Cus (NT), dated 21.11.1994, as amended. Export of these items to Pakistan would be regulated under our current Export Policy.

(c) Yes Sir. Pakistan has so far not granted MFN status to India despite its obligations, including under the WTO, and has cited extraneous political, economic and other reasons for this.

(d) No Sir. Imports from India into Pakistan are regulated by the positive list of items permitted by Pakistan for import from India. Varying rates of duty are applicable on the 768 items included in the postive list of imports from India.

(e) and (f) Do not arise.

Effect of CECA with Singapore on Indian private Banks

1738. SHRI RAJEEV SHUKLA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that recently approved Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with Singapore has provisions that confer exclusive privileges to banks based out of Singapore, including option of merging with or acquiring Indian private Banks;

(b) if so, whether the said provision can have far-reaching, negative consequences for the Indian banking industry; and

(c) whether Government will make suitable alterations to the provisions of CECA to protect interests of Indian private banks?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) to (c) Under the recently approved India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), Singapore Banks permitted to invest in private sector banks in India through the FDI route subject to the following conditions:—

— Total foreign investment (both FDI and FII) should not exceed 74%.

— Banks will have to follow the one mode of presence criteria laid down by RBI. Under this criteria, foreign banks can have a presence in the Indian markets through one of these forms; (a) branches (b) not more than one wholly owned subsidiaries (c) Joint ventures.

Problems of pepper farmers in Kerala

1739. SHRI THENNALA G. BALAKRISHNA PILLAI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the pepper farmers of Kerala have been facing a lot of problems forcing some of them to commit suicide;

(b) if so, the number of farmers who have ended their lives;

(c) the reasons for taking such a drastic steps;

(d) whether it is a fact that import of low quality pepper from neighbouring countries has resulted in drastic fall in the prices of pepper, whereas the pepper produced in India is of the best quality;

(e) whether the Central Government plan to take steps to protect the pepper growers of Kerala; and

(f) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) to (f) The major reason for a fall in prices of pepper is the substantial increase in world production due to the entry of new pepper producing countries such as Vietnam which has created a glut in the World market. The Government has received reports about the distressed state of pepper growers in Kerala due to the decline in prices. The State Government of Kerala has reported some suicides in the Wynad District of Kerala which is the main pepper growing area. However, the State Government was not in a position to establish the cause of the suicides.

The Government of India has taken the following steps to help pepper growers:

- The Government has launched the National Horticulture Mission in May, 2005 with a view to take up the development of horticulture